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JACQUE LYNN COLTON, ACTOR, BURBANK

At breakfast I don't want to think about dressing up or putting on my face or running into anyone I know, and I don't want to have a conversation. I just want to be left alone with my newspaper.

There's a little place — I almost hesitate to tell anyone about it because it's so infrequently busy in the morning — it's called Nature's Pantry, it's on Riverside Drive in Burbank. You get two English muffins, whole-wheat-berry English muffins, and eggs and cheese for $1.70, but they don't have coffee, so I place my order and walk down the street to Bake It Again Sam, the first gourmet coffee-and-bagels place in the area, and when I get back with my coffee and my paper, my food is ready.

My only problem is that I can't find the kind of breakfast I like — truck-driver breakfasts for around $5 — and great coffee in the same place. Americans like coffee weak, so if you want it made gourmet strength, you have to ask, or you have to go to someplace like Moca City in the Lakeside Plaza shopping mall. Emon, where I sometimes have lunch or dinner, is there too. It has Japanese food and outdoor tables, and I don't think it's possible to spend more than $6 there for . . . like noodles with chicken or sprouts, but I avoid the artificial crab. And then I walk to the drugstore that sells the trades and over to Moca City for coffee.

Then there's the famous Eat n' Park, near Victory and Buena Vista in Burbank. That's a place I take people to for shock value. It's like a real truck-driver café. They have omelets that have the most amazing things in them. Like a whole hamburger steak that's wrapped in an omelet with asparagus and cheese — they're gigantic, they're almost obscene. And the morning of the earthquake they were serving breakfast. My whole kitchen was trashed, it was awash with broken dishware and bottles and, oooh, collectibles, and Eat n' Park was the only place I could find in Burbank that was open. It was like "the show must go on" of truck drivers.

There's like a restaurant breakfast war going on right now, and sometimes I drive to the IHOP in North Hollywood for their $2.99 breakfasts — fabulous omelets with two pancakes. Denny's coffee is better and Norm's coffee is better too, but Norm's has a special with fresh-squeezed orange juice for under $3, and they'll give you an egg substitute if you want it. I resent places that charge extra for something you're not getting.

For lunch, Dalts at Riverside and Olive is fabulous. I'm nutty for Caesar salads, and they'll add a Caesar to any entrée for $2. And they'll leave the croutons off and put the dressing on the side. And they have really cute young waiters, they all wear shorts with lots of legs flashing by.

Oh, another thing. I'm often alone and a lot of places are nasty to people who are alone. They tell you that they only have tables for four or that you'll have to wait two hours. It's almost made me want to be a food critic so I can say how nasty some people are, but I'll let you do that.

Bake It Again Sam, 4007 Riverside Dr., Burbank; (818) 846-7118.

Dalts, 3500 W. Olive St., Burbank; (818) 953-7752.

Eat n' Park, 2517 W. Victory Blvd., Burbank; (818) 843-9301.

IHOP, many locations.

Moca City, 311 N. Pass Ave., Burbank; (818) 955-5141.

Emon, 325 N. Pass Ave., Burbank; (818) 845-0089.

Nature's Pantry, 3917 Riverside Dr., Burbank; (818) 841-0123.

RICHARD MELTZER, WRITER, MIRACLE MILE

TOM BARLOW

I was once asked for a Valentine's Day issue of the *Weekly*, "What is your favorite romantic restaurant?" and I said, as there is only one restaurant in L.A., Damiano's Mr. Pizza, it is ipso facto the only romantic blablabla. So I'll take the same tack with this. The only restaurant that I can afford that has anything I want is Damiano's Mr. Pizza, the one on Fairfax. It is the only pizza in L.A. which tastes like pizza. You, personally, can say anything you want, but in such cities as Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, Montréal, et cetera, there is something which for at least 75 years has been called pizza. And I like that pizza, and this idiot pastry quiche thing that certain entrepreneurs here want to call pizza is not. Pizza has three ingredients that matter: crust, sauce and cheese — spice, make it four — and there is not one restaurant in L.A. that gets more than two of them right on the best of nights. Damiano's, depending on who's cooking that night, can get one or two of them wrong, but never more than that.

There are two kinds of food that I will go to if my health permitted — pizza and French fries. I say "health permitting" — basically, if I didn't mind the dread constipation, I would eat pizza every day. French fries, I assume, will harden my arteries. I will sometimes see French fries that are just so greasy that it seems dangerous. At my age, danger is a factor.

I do continue to like all cuisines. I've been taken to fancy places by record-company cretins and stuff like that. Once in a while on my birthday maybe somebody will take me out to eat, but there is not one restaurant — I don't mind the Border Grill, I don't mind Gardel's, I've been to the Ivy — once at each, the Ivy and the Ivy at the Shore. But I can't afford places with a $17 entrée too often. There is no single restaurant in this town that I love, so I'm always up for new offers.

Places I like to drink? In this town there are no places I like to drink, I'd just as soon drink at home. There is not now nor has there ever been a bar in this town that is as good as a third-rate bar in major American cities. For one thing, every bar in L.A. has a TV on all the time. In New York, you'd have a TV on for the World Series or a title fight. Bars are antidotes for TV. You don't go to a bar to watch TV.

In Canter's they actually had a reprint of the *Times* declaring them the best pastrami sandwich in town. Which is like, excuse me — again, it isn't even pastrami. Pastrami has peppercorns; their pastrami does not. Pastrami is a spicy meat; their pastrami is not. I mean, if it's going to have nitrites, it might as well have some taste.

The average deli here is a joke, the average Italian — I mean, no matter what you want to say about Italian restaurants, there is no Italian community in L.A. The average Italian restaurant here, you could do better with frozen food.

Obviously, there are good Mexican restaurants in town. And there are good Chinese restaurants in the San Gabriel Valley. But I'm not in the mood for treks to get to these places. Within real finite distance of where I live, such places don't exist.

So I'll stick with Damiano's Mr. Pizza.

Damiano's Mr. Pizza, 412 N. Fairfax Ave., West Hollywood; (213) 658-7611.

Border Grill, 1445 Fourth St., Santa Monica; (310) 451-1655. Border Grill on Melrose is defunct.

Gardel's, 7963 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles; (213) 655-0891.

The Ivy, 113 N. Robertson Blvd., Los Angeles; (310) 274-8303.

The Ivy at the Shore, 1541 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica; (310) 393-3113.

MARK HOROWITZ, WRITER, BRONSON CANYON

I have lunch out all the time. I go to the Yuca's Hut — this is a solitary lunch. The Yuca's Hut, I would say, more frequently than anything else. I'm a creature of sickening habit. I get the cochinita pibil taco or the bean-and-cheese burrito. I'd rather have six cochinita pibil tacos and a machaca taco and a chile verde pork burrito, but I get nervous about the quantity of *meat*, so I get the bean-and-cheese burrito as a kind of atonement. I don't really *like* the bean-and-cheese. What I really like is the pork dish that you can only get as a burrito, which is like pork with green chiles. And it's *amazing*. People from out of town, I always take them there, and I make them, even if they only have a few bites from each, we get one of those burritos, I get them the machaca taco and the cochinita taco. People just can't believe it. It's so funky and it's so great.

People from out of town, I take them to Yuca's Hut, I take them to the San Gabriel Mall with all the Chinese restaurants. If they're here on an expense account, we always go to Matsuhisa on La Cienega. I take them to the rib place down off Crenshaw, Phillips, the one that's a hole in the wall, literally.

Sometimes I take people down to San Pedro. I'm not too good at names, but if you go to San Pedro, to that Fisherman Thing where there's like six restaurants, just horrible tacky touristy nonsense, right on the port, so you're always facing some WWII battleship being disassembled for scrap to be shipped to Taiwan, which is great — the last time I was there it was the *Bonhomme Richard*, it was a destroyer-escort or something like that. Anyway, it's the Fisherman's Wharf of San Pedro — is it called Port o' Call? — and it's just disgusting fried-fish crap, but in the middle of this kind of cute kind of village, there's a fish market. You go into the market and you buy like a pound of shrimp, which is theoretically fresh, you take it out back to this seagull-shit-encrusted vest deck and you hand it to these Hispanic gentlemen or women and they grill it with like onions and peppers and spices right on an open grill, you pay them a buck, and you can get garlic bread and other stuff. They dump it on a plate when it's done, and then there's other guys selling beer out of stainless-steel drums, and on weekends there are mariachi players. It's just delightful. You feel kind of hip because you've skipped the disgusting places and gone to the cool place, and the cool place is filled with a wonderful assortment of people — bikers, and lots and lots of Latinos, hundreds of people.

But expense accounts, Matsuhisa is at the top of the list. I always let them choose the meal. I've done it where I say "You choose," total bill has to be no more than $50 a person. But during the American Book Association convention I went with a friend of mine who's an editor, she pretended on her expense account that I was three romance writers from the Midwest, and it was like $200 or more for the two of us.

For takeout, it's Zankou chicken. I'm pretty predictable.

Yuca's Hut, 2056 N. Hillhurst Ave., Los Feliz; (213) 662-1214.

San Gabriel Mall, 140 W. Valley Blvd., San Gabriel.

Matsuhisa, 129 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills; (310) 659-9639.

Phillips Bar-B-Que, 4307 Leimert Blvd., Los Angeles; (213) 292-7613.

The San Pedro Fish Market, Port o' Call Village, Berth 77 (near Sixth Street and Harbor Boulevard) San Pedro; (310) 832-4251.

Zankou Chicken, 5065 W. Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles; (213) 665-7845.

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